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SUBJECT: KRG UPBEAT ON TALKS WITH TURKEY

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 B. B) BAGHDAD 1426
 C. C) BAGHDAD 1425

Classified By: Classified by RRT Erbil U.S. Team Teader Jess Bailly for
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This is an Erbil Regional Reconstruction Team message.

1. (C) Summary: On May 5, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) provided the RRT an upbeat assessment of Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani,s May 1 meeting with the Turkish delegation in Baghdad. Both the KRG and GOT principals recalled positive periods in their relationship, criticized the media,s negative role, and underscored the need to avoid intemperate rhetoric. While both sides agreed to maintain this dialogue, they did not agree on specific next steps. According to the KRG, the talks reflected Ankara,s newfound recognition of the need to deal with the KRG. Despite the May 1 airstrikes in the Qandil area, KRG public statements have echoed this positive assessment. Privately, however, KDP Security Chief Masrur Barzani continues to harbor doubts about Turkey,s real intentions and the ability of Turkish civilians to control the military. End Summary.

Turkish Delegation Emphasizes the Positive

2. (C) Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Director of Foreign Relations Falah Bakir Mustafa provided RRT Team Leader an official readout on the May 1 meetings in Baghdad with a Turkish delegation including PM Erdogan advisor Ahmet Davutoglu, Special Coordinator for Iraq Murat Ozelik, and Turkish Ambassador to Iraq Derya Kanbay. Speaking from a prepared set of notes, Bakir said that the meetings at President Talabani,s residence began with discussion and lunch on Iraqi-Turkish relations with a large GoI and KRG delegation. After the lunch, the Turks and KRG representatives sat down for bilateral talks.

3. (C) Davutoglu began the discussion with the KRG by laying out his vision of four principles to guide Turkey,s relations with the KRG: joint security, improved economic ties, dialogue, and normalization.8 He said Turkey wants to improve the relationship and decried the negative role that media played in the relationship. He admitted that PM Erdogan sometimes made unwise comments to the media without consulting his staff, which Bakir claims the Kurdish delegation views as an indirect way of criticizing President Barzani,s own intemperate rhetoric. Davutoglu said Turkey appreciated the Kurdish parties, past efforts to fight the PKK but commented that &something changed8 after 2003.

4. (C) Turning to the current situation, Davutoglu claimed the PKK is provoking and trying to humiliate the Turkish armed forces and that Turkey must respond. Thus far, the

Government of Turkey is pleased with the recent measures the KRG had taken against the PKK, but then expressed concern over the 200 PKK members or sympathizers who had passed through Erbil International Airport for a PKK Congress. At this point, Nechirvan Barzani interrupted asserted that the KRG remained vigilant at the airports and denied that PKK members had transited Erbil. He invited the Turkish intelligence liaisons in Erbil to review the arrival records for themselves. (Note: Per reftel A, RRT TL reminded Bakir that the USG had also raised concerns to KRG Minister of Interior Sinjari about PKK operatives attending a PKK congress. Per reftel B, Iraqi President Talabani acknowledged that the 200 had entered Iraq but said they transited from Iran, not through Erbil.)

15. (C) Davutoglu also described the status of Kirkuk as an internal Iraqi matter and that Turkey only wanted all groups to participate in a solution. He praised KRG President Masoud Barzani, s honestly and credibility, and emphasized that this summer would be crucial to the relationship between the Turks and Iraqi Kurds. They need to use the moment to build trust and emphasize the positive in public statements.

16. (C) Special Representative Murat Ozelik spoke next. According to Bakir, he noted that a step-by-step approach to repair KRG-GoT relations will take time and he considered it a noble mission to bring Turks and Iraqi Kurds closer together. He also recognized that solving the PKK issue requires long-term solutions.

And Nechirvan Reciprocates

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17. (C) Nechirvan Barzani responded to Davutoglu and Ozelik, s statements by thanking Turkey for its support to the Kurds during the Anfal campaign and after 1991. He noted that he always recalls this support when speaking about Turkey. He sees Turkey as a natural partner for the KRG, and wants to normalize relations and be Turkey, s gateway to the rest of Iraq. Nechirvan emphasized that the KRG does not support and is not responsible for the PKK; the PKK is a problem for both of us. The difference, he said, is that the KRG does not see a military solution to the PKK issue. He also invited a Turkish delegation to meet with his uncle in Erbil. They would discover that contrary to Turkish perceptions, Masoud has the same views as the rest of the Kurdish leadership about the PKK. Davutoglu reportedly said that he would think over the invitation.

Nechirvan Upbeat but Masrur Casts Doubts

18. (C) Emphasizing that he spoke for Nechirvan, Bakir called the meeting a good beginning and said the dialogue will continue, though he did not specify next steps. Nechirvan thinks the initiative represents a policy change by the Turks, who were tired of not dealing with the reality of the KRG. Bakir noted Nechirvan, s preference for dealing with Ozelik, as a representative of the Turkish state) and by extension the Turkish military) rather than Davutoglu, who he believes seeks only quick victories to boost the AKP. He also voiced his doubts about the long-term reliability of the AKP given its Islamist roots. (Note: Barzani made similar points to Senior Advisor Krajeski in a May 6 meeting.) KDP International Relations Chief Safeen Dizayee will remain the working-level contact in the KRG for the Turks.

19. (C) Asked about the KRG, s reaction to Turkey, s May 1 air operations against PKK targets near Qandil Mountain, Bakir said the KRG deliberately had reacted in a low-key manner. He noted that the KRG, s web sites) in English,

Kurdish, and Arabic) only carried positive statements on the meetings with Turkey and made no mention of Turkey,s military incursion. Bakir said when speaking to the media he refused to get drawn into speculating about which event) the meeting or the air strikes) represented Turkey,s true attitude. Masoud Barzani,s statements since the meeting have put a positive spin on the meetings. For example, the KDP daily reported that on May 6 Barzani told a group of party officials that &(Turkey,s) psychological barrier (toward the KRG) has been lifted and we are looking for positive steps to be taken.8

¶10. (C) In a May 6 meeting with Senior Advisor Krajewski and RRTOffs, Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) Security chief and Masoud Barzani,s son Masrur began by towing the official line on the meetings in Baghdad. He said Turkey needs to understand that the KRG is not a threat to Turkey. He observed that their military operations strengthen the PKK and push the organization toward Iran, but also suggested Turkey,s dealings with the PKK belie a &hidden agenda8 toward the KRG. Questioning the utility of the meetings in Baghdad when Turkey launched airstrikes the very same evening, he asked whether the delegation &really had power if they have no control over the military.8

¶11. (C) Comment: The KRG,s scripted, upbeat readout of the meetings in Baghdad and low key response to the May 1 air strikes in Qandil reflect their leadership,s) notably Nechirvan,s -- determination to improve relations with Ankara. Public statements have echoed this line. Masrur,s comments about the Turkish military and FM Zebari,s less effusive assessment of the meeting (ref B), however, indicate that some Kurdish leaders remain unconvinced about a fundamental shift in Turkish policy. Turkey and the KRG agreed on the need to build trust through a step-by-step approach during the next few months but the KRG did not reveal any specific next steps. Turning the good vibes into meaningful improvement will require focus and sustained efforts on both sides. End comment.
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